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ABSTRACT

This second edition of guidelines for weeding school library media collections is addressed especially to elementary and secondary school library media centers and to community college and vocational school library resource centers in Iowa. This publication is designed for those who want weeding of all formats of materials and equipment (not just printed materials) to become an integral part of their selection-acquisition-use-discard cycle. Some philosophy about weeding is included, and specific guidelines are summarized. A summary of past departmental policy statements and planning procedures dealing with library collection weeding is followed by topical sections on: why, when, and how to weed; subjective and objective weeding criteria; the eight phases of the weeding procedure; weeding guidance for print and nonprint collections in schools and community colleges; and how to discard. (Contains 21 references.) (MAS)

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WEEDING
THE LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER COLLECTIONS

SECOND EDITION

STATE OF IOWA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1994

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WEEDING

THE LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER COLLECTIONS

SECOND EDITION

By Betty Jo Buckingham

Revised by Barbara Safford

With Lucille Lettow, Andrea Rauer and students
from the Library Science Division of the University of Northern Iowa

STATE OF IOWA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1994

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Let no book remain on the shelves unless someone fights to keep it there. Let an undefended book be a condemned book. This must be the accepted philosophy of the library. Gone must be the static conception of the library as a storage organ, and in its place we must conceive of the library as a dynamic circulatory system, a channel through which books pass on their way from the publisher to the incinerator.

G. Hardin, "Doctrine of Sufferance in the Library," **College and Research Libraries**, 8(April, 1947), p. 120-124.

INTRODUCTION

This document is offered in response to numerous questions library media specialists have about weeding library media collections. It is addressed especially to elementary and secondary school library media centers and to community college and vocational school library resource centers in Iowa. The assistance of Librarian, Mary Jo Bruett and the INFORMS service of the Department of Education, Kay Elliott, Human Services Department Librarian, Barbara Safford and her students of the Library Science Division of the University of Northern Iowa, Lucille Lettow, Youth Librarian at the University of Northern Iowa, and Andrea M. Rauer, K-8 Media Specialist in the West Branch Community Schools in the preparation and editing of this document is gratefully acknowledged.

The professional literature on weeding libraries tends to be brief, superficial or designed for large university and technical libraries. It also tends to assume that only books, or at best print materials, need to be weeded. This publication is designed to provide a middle ground for those who want weeding of all formats of materials, and of equipment, to become an integral part of their collection management cycle.

In **Selection of Instructional Materials, A Model Policy and Rules**, first issued by the Department in 1975 and revised in 1983, and again in 1994, "the ongoing nature of selection, involving assignment of responsibility of selection and continuous evaluation by school staff members..." is emphasized. Under "Ill procedure for Selection," two statements relate to the "ongoing nature of selection":

> 1. In selecting materials for purchase for the media center, the media specialist will **evaluate the existing collection** [emphasis added] and the curriculum needs and will consult reputable, professionally prepared selection aids and other appropriate sources. (p. 11)
>
> 4. Selection is an ongoing process which shall include the removal of materials no longer appropriate and the replacement of lost and worn materials still of educational value. (pp. 11-12)

Plan for Progress in the Library Media Center, PK-12: A Guide to Planning for School Library Media Programs and for District, AEAMC, and other Support of those Programs emphasizes the complexity of providing "resources and equipment which will satisfy the curricular and recreational reading, viewing and listening requirements of students." (p. 3) It goes on to say that "The collection must provide a wide range of variety of resources to meet the educational needs, special learning needs, learning styles, and interests of the students and staff...The adequacy of the collection must be determined by how well the collection meets the

needs of its users." (p. 29) It is obvious that collections which contain outdated or incomplete information, in worn, unattractive packages are not meeting those needs. **Plans for Progress** also includes a section dealing specifically with replacement cycles for all library media collection items, including both materials and equipment. (p. 28)

Clearly the Department's position is that weeding is a valuable and integral part of the entire selection or collection management process. It is appropriate, therefore, for a document such as this to address the question of weeding specifically.

It must be remembered that discarding school materials is the ultimate responsibility of the superintendent who must determine that materials and equipment have no inherent value, not just for the library media program, but for the school. Specific assignment of this responsibility to the library media specialist would be helpful.

The selection policy and procedure statement, or a separate policy and procedure statement of the school district, should assign responsibility to discard library materials and equipment,* preferably to the librarian. A statement similar to the one given here should be adopted by the superintendent and board of education:

> The library media specialist may remove from the library media center materials, equipment and furniture no longer of value to the library media program following general selection and weeding (collection management) guidelines. The materials and equipment* will then be reviewed by the librarian** to determine their possible intrinsic worth to other groups or individuals in the following priority order:
>
> 1) To another unit of the school. If deemed of value, items will be offered for examination and transfer by a stated time.
>
> 2) To other libraries supported by public funds. If deemed of value, items 2 will be offered for sale by a stated time.
>
> 3) To the general public. If deemed of value to the public, items will be offered for sale at a stated time.

If items are determined to be of no value, or if no group or individual under points 1, 2, or 3 above claims them, items may be discarded in keeping with general procedures for discard (e.g., removal to landfill).

* School systems might wish to add at least specialized library furniture.

** For the protection of the librarian some schools may prefer "by the librarian and the principal and/or department heads" or "by the librarian and the library committee." The general school system process may be used in offering furniture for sale to the public if it is included in the policy.

WHY WEED

John Cotton Dana's librarian who is "a trifle awed by a book, still more awed by a book which is in the library, and still more by a book in the library which a man once wished to see," would have seen no reason to weed. Martin Erich, in an article in **Wilson Library Bulletin** in September 1975, gave a list of 29 "Criteria for NOT discarding" and concluded, "With these guidelines, you will probably never discard a single book from your library." (p. 58) While Erich no doubt wrote "tongue in cheek," that appears to have been and to be a prevalent attitude.

In contrast, Ezra Pound's **A B C of Reading** (1934) emphasized that "The weeder is supremely needed if the garden of the Muses is to persist as a garden." The author recently spent some time rescuing a strawberry patch from weeds. There was at least twice as much green in the garden before the attack. But, if the weeds had been permitted to remain, the strawberries would have been much harder of find. Many would have gone to waste. Few people are interested enough to search among the weeds for the strawberries. The same thing is true of libraries. H. H. A. Bernt, writing "On Weeding," in **Library Journal** over five decades ago said:

> Very few students come willingly to a library that is filled with ugly, tattered books even to find a few new ones they may have heard about...

That is still true today. If books and other library materials are used, they become worn. Frequently the library media center becomes the burial ground for old textbooks and other items teachers no longer find useful. Customs and costumes change. The curriculum or the faculty changes and large parts of the collection fall into the seldom-used category. Librarians try to choose carefully, but none is so omniscient as to avoid picking a loser occasionally. Whether or not resources are used, many become dated, and perhaps mislead students because "truth" has changed since the resources were written or produced. As the Geography Book in Bruce Vogel's play "The Adventures of Molly Keeper," in **School Library Journal** (1992) so plaintively puts it: "I never wanted to lie to children. Now I'm old, I can't help it. But hey!. It's not my fault. I can't discard myself. A librarian has to do it for me." (p. 142) Librarians who have become so attached to items in a collection that it is difficult (impossible) to remove any of them should, perhaps, plan with another librarian to weed one another's collections.

"Systematic weeding," wrote the authors of "Weeding the Small Library Collection," issued by the American Library Association in 1962, "is not an irresponsible disposal of public property, but a public service which is often the first, most needed act in increasing library use."

Weeding relates to collection management in two ways; first, individual items become worn or out of date or no longer appropriate to curriculum or to student interests. Secondly, the analysis and evaluation of the collection as a whole emphasizes the necessity of weeding the **collection** systematically to keep it responsive to users' needs.

Responsible librarians must weed and must weed as part of the total selection and evaluation process:

1. To make space for more valuable items.
2. To provide a more appealing, more up-to-date collection.
3. To make the library easier for patrons and staff to use.
4. To provide reliable information.

5. To encourage patrons to handle materials carefully since they appear to have been so treated.

6. To provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses of the collection.

7. To remove the ILLUSION of a well-rounded, well-stocked collection.

WHEN TO WEED

When to weed can be considered from the view of time of day, time of year, frequency, or where weeding fits in the general plan. The "Introduction" already emphasized the need for evaluation and weeding to be part of the selection policy and part of the selection-acquisition-use-discard, or collection management cycle. Segal's **Crew Manual** (1976) also states that weeding should be part of the selection policy and proposes a statement such as:

> Materials which no longer meet the stated objectives of the library will be discarded according to accepted professional practices... Disposition of library material will be at the discretion of the librarian subject to all relevant provisions... (p. 6)

of the governing institution.

Standards published by the U.S. Department of Heath, Education and Welfare three decades ago spoke of the need for weeding to be a continuous process. The **Recommended Standards for Junior College Libraries** calls for "systematic and regular discarding: of obsolete material. Both junior and senior high school standards emphasized keeping collections up-to-date by continuous weeding and replacement.

Information Power, published by the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology in 1988 states that "Evaluation of collection plans, of the collection as a whole, and of individual items must be ongoing." (p. 77)

Because so much of the weeding process is based on the school curriculum and on how teachers implement curriculum as well as on specific interests of faculty and students in a particular school, typical advice to new media specialists is to not weed in the first year in a building. (See, for example, **Calgary Board of Education**, p. 419.) Others point out that some judicious weeding can be done immediately: do we really want a copy of **Asbestos, the Miracle Fiber** in our collection? Douglas A. Johnson in **School Library Journal** (1990) points out how a first year media specialist, working closely with teachers, can begin a weeding project. (p. 48)

The Prostanos, in **School Library Media Center** (1982), their book on library management, emphasize that weeding begins with acquisition where one should refuse to keep an item just because it is free. The selection criteria of currency, authority and need should be applied to everything acquired whether purchased or free. They propose weeding as a continuing task pursued throughout the year at slack times, but recognize that weeding the whole collection may take more than one year. Anitra Gordon in the September 1983 **School Library Journal** proposes systematic weeding before a teacher begins a unit, and informal weeding when ordering and as time permits. ALA's publication of "Weeding the Small Library Collection" recommends continuous spot weeding as items are handled and periodic weeding of the whole collection. Small libraries might cover the whole collection at once on a two to three year cycle; larger libraries could do part of their collection each year completing one cycle in two to three years.

The Crew Manual (1976) suggests building weeding into the year's work cycle, establishing priorities and avoiding weeding a section during its peak use season.

Several authors advocate combining inventory and weeding. This means items need to be handled only once and that the shelf list can be marked to indicate action taken, or cards can be pulled from the shelf list at once if an immediate decision can be made. With the shelf list at hand, it is easier to determine gaps and duplication. If part of the order is submitted after inventory, reordering is expedited. If the inventory is conducted at the end of the school year, old copies may

not need to be retained since the new ones may be ready for shelving when the next term begins. This system perhaps works best when the librarian does not consult the faculty. Weeding during inventory may also be used as a supplement to the formal weeding process.

The most practical program for community college and school libraries would appear to be to establish a cycle, such as three years, weeding a part of the collection each year. This should be supplemented by incidental weeding related to selection and circulation. Combining the weeding and inventory processes may save steps.

One essential time when weeding must become a priority is in the preparation for automating circulation and/or cataloging of a collection. The time and expense involved in converting records to machine-readable form should not be wasted on materials that are no longer of use. Morris, Gillespie, and Spirt point out in **Administering the School Library** (1992) that the first step in preparing for automation is "a thorough weeding of the collection." (p. 379)

HOW TO WEED

Most writers appear to agree that weeding, like selection is the responsibility of the librarian although the ultimate legal responsibility rests with the school administrator. Many still advocate a subjective approach but most would include objective triggering mechanisms. Some would turn away from the subjective approach all together. Most would never base decisions entirely on objective indicators. All would apply some criteria to this reverse selection.

Subjective weeding is based on the individual judgment of the library staff with or without assistance from the faculty. The faculty may be asked for an opinion on items about which the librarian or library media specialist is unsure. Some authors suggest having the faculty member(s) make a preliminary judgment which the librarian then checks. However, major changes in the faculty recommendation can lead to poor public relations unless the librarian makes the goals and guidelines very clear and non-threatening. Faculty members could be asked to discuss their recommendations with the librarian. They may need a "don't know" category in addition to the "retain" and "discard" categories.

Objective weeding involves setting a specific objective guideline such as the age of the item, how many times it has been used in a given period, or how recently it has been checked out. Essentially the librarian predicts that new items and/or recently checked out items will be checked out often in the future. Research appears to indicate that items not checked out in the past ten years are not likely to be used in the future. For curriculum related materials in a school or community college library media center the time may be much shorter than that. Even one year of non-circulation can give a clue on changes in direction of curriculum and consequent lack of use. According to research, the age of an item can also be useful in predicting frequency of check out, but it is less accurate than previous check outs in making such predictions.

SUBJECTIVE WEEDING

Library media specialists must be sensitive to accuracy in portrayals of racial, ethnic, gender, and disability issues in their collections. Some critics use "political correctness" as a pejorative term to decry over sensitivity to these social issues. The media specialist must remember the overall selection criteria and the purpose of the collection when weeding in these areas; concepts of inclusion rather than exclusion and of balance of ideas on controversial issues may provide good anchors of professional decision making. But Laura Moe (1993) raises a crucial question for professionals when she asks in **The Book Report**, "Is It Censorship, Political Correctness or Weeding?" (p. 21) These are concerns not easily addressable in any one document; but they need to be discussed within school buildings, districts, and the profession. Individual media specialists should weed with a constant awareness of such concerns.

Perhaps the best way to weed material which denigrated groups such as women and minorities is to exercise care in selection. The National Council of Teachers of English and specific social group guidelines have been widely used to help in selection of library and text materials which are issue-fair. Tools such as these can also be used for weeding. Probably most weeding of such materials should occur as better replacement materials are available and as items would normally be considered for weeding.

SUBJECTIVE WEEDING CRITERIA

There appears to be general agreement on criteria to guide subjective weeding of print and nonprint materials, whether circulating or noncirculating:

1. Poor physical shape
   a. Film or paper brittle
   b. Colors faded
   c. Paper yellowed or torn
   d. Records or book covers scratched or warped
   e. Bindings ragged

2. Poor format
   a. Small print
   b. Poor quality pictures

3. Poor content
   a. Out of date, especially computers, science, medicine, technology, geography, travel, transportation, telecommunication, popular culture
   b. Trivial subject or approach
   c. Mediocre writing
   d. Inaccurate information
   e. Repetitious series
   f. Superseded editions
   g. Not on standard lists
   h. Not defended by subject specialist or teacher

4. Inappropriate for the specific collection
   a. Neither circulated nor used for reference
   b. Unneeded duplicates
   c. Unneeded titles in little-used subject areas; retain basic titles
   d. Interest or reading level inappropriate for clients
   e. Change in curriculum and/or age group served

5. What not to weed (see also chart on weeding Guidance)
   a. Classics except when more attractive format is available
   b. Local and Iowa history unless can replace with new copies
   c. Annuals and other major publications of the school or community college
   d. Materials such as public relations brochures, and bond advertising which could be considered archival, if no other unit of the institution maintains such files
   e. Items incorrectly classified or poorly promoted which might circulate under changed circumstances
   f. Items such as poetry anthologies included in currently used indexes

Proponents of subjective weeding suggest that librarians should know the collections, the clients, and the clients' need for and use of the collections. Obviously school and community college library media specialists would also need to know the curriculum. Some even suggest reading in a subject area before weeding. More recommend involving the faculty either to do preliminary weeding, or to pass judgment on what the library staff has pulled.

OBJECTIVE WEEDING

While few library media specialists would allow all items meeting objective criteria to be discarded automatically, such criteria can be useful in identifying candidates for weeding. Moreover, objective criteria can be applied by aides, volunteers, or students.

> Statistical techniques are meant to be filtering systems, which, in this case, funnel a set of books to the attention of more qualified and sensitive personnel. (Turner, p. 137)

Filtering for noncirculating materials such as reference books, and for circulating materials for which no record is kept such as periodicals and audiovisual items, may have to depend on date of publication or production.

Automated circulation systems can easily provide records to use in objective standards to identify possible candidates for weeding. The number of circulations for each item is accumulated by the computer system. Lists can be generated of items with low circulation over a set period of shelf life determined by the media specialist. These items can be crossed-checked against copyright or purchase date and the resulting pool can be evaluated by the media specialist.

Manual circulation systems can keep track of circulations over a set period of time by using date slips or by marking the item itself with a colored pencil or label at each circulation. Using various colors per semester or year can show patterns of circulation over a period of time.

Rather than base weeding only on individual items, the American Library Association has traditionally dealt with percentages in a different way, suggesting that 5% of the collection be weeded in any given year. **Plans for Progress** gives similar advice for both materials and equipment. (p. 28). **Planning the School Library Media Center Budget** (1994) offers several suggestions for replacement cycles (pp. 11-14).

Doll and Barron point out the relationship of weeding to the quality of the total collection in **Collection Analysis for the School Library Media Center** (1991). They offer easy and useful data forms to use for objective collection analysis as well as some general comments about weeding as an obvious next step after an analysis.

WEEDING PROCEDURES

If a school library media center or community college library resource center chooses to use a combination of objective and subjective methods for weeding, the following multi-phase procedure, much of which could be done by aides or volunteers, might be helpful:

PHASE ONE: Identify cutoff circulation records. One might want identified any item that has not circulated in the past two years.

PHASE TWO: Identify cutoff copyright date. It may be useful to have different dates for various areas of the collection; 10 years for fiction, 1 year for computer books.

PHASE THREE: Identify items in poor physical condition.

PHASE FOUR: Items identified by these steps should be checked against standard lists. Those items included on the lists should be flagged for further evaluation by the professional staff.

PHASE FIVE: Teachers in appropriate subject areas can be asked to identify items they desire to be retained.

PHASE SIX: The professional staff may use subjective criteria for evaluating items suggested for weeding.

PHASE SEVEN: Items to be retained should have poor physical condition remedied by repair, rebinding, or replacement.

PHASE EIGHT: Items to be weeded should be removed from shelf list, catalog, or computer records. Items should be physically disposed of.

Segal, "Weeding the Small Library Collection" and several other publications offer tables or specific advice for weeding categories of materials. Most of these are a mix of subjective and objective guidelines. While in the final analysis the decision is individual, the following table, typical of those offered, may help in the development of a local table to guide an initial sort.

WEEDING GUIDANCE
FOR PRINT AND NONPRINT COLLECTIONS
IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Class	Subject	Age	Last Circ.	Comments
000	General	5	2	
	Computers	1-2	2	Prefer periodicals
020	Library Science	5	2	
030	Encyclopedias	5	NA	Replace 1 set/year Do not put old sets in classrooms
100	Phil/Psychology	10	2	Be sure self-help books are current
200	Religion	5-10	3-5	Retain basic titles
290	Mythology	10-15	5	Retain basic; replace with new editions
300	Social Science	5	3	Retain balance on controversial issues
310	Almanacs/Yearbooks	1	NA	Have latest; may circulate year old issues
320	Political Science	5	3	
340	Law	5	3	
350	Government	5	3	
360	Social problems	5	2	Monitor constantly
370	Education	5	3	

380	Commerce	5	3	Watch for geopolitical change
390	Etiquette	5	3	
	Customs/Folklore	10-15	5	Retain basic; update editions
400	Language	10	3-5	Discard texts
	Dictionaries	NA	NA	Retain Merriam-Webster 2nd International
500	General	5	5	Retain classics such as Darwin
510	Math	10	3-5	
570	Biology/Natural History	10	3-5	Keep taxonomies; add biomes
580	Botany	10	3-5	
600	General	5	3-5	
610	Anatomy	NA	5	
	Health issues	5	3	Constantly monitor change in disease diagnosis, treatment
620	Mechanics	5	3	Retain car manuals
630	Agriculture	5-10	3-5	Retain Iowa-related materials
640	Home economics/Family life	5	3	Retain basic cookbooks; Discard four food groups...
650	Business	10	5	
660	Chemistry	5	3-5	
690	Manufacturing	10	5	Retain materials on collectibles
700	General	NA	NA	Keep all basic, especially art history
745	Crafts	10	5	Keep well illustrated; monitor fads
770	Photography	5	5	Avoid dated techniques equipment

790	Sports	5	3-5	Watch teams that change locations
800	Literature	NA	NA	Keep basic, especially criticism; discard minor, unassigned writers; check indexes before discarding poetry
900	General	15	5	Demand; accuracy, fairness
910	Geography	5	3-5	Monitor geopolitical changes; be ruthless
920	Biography	NA	3-5	Discard fading stars
E/F	Easy, Fiction	NA	2-5	Keep high demand, series, high literary merit; award winners; check against lists
V/F	Vertical File	2-5	2	Date acquisition for easier control
	Vocational File	2-5	2	Monitor
	College Catalogs	2-5	NA	Prefer on-line access
P	Periodicals	5	NA	Discard non-indexed after worn by circulation
**	**Local History**	**NA**	**NA**	**Do not discard; preserve**

HOW TO DISCARD

The question of how to be rid of items once the decision has been made to discard is a ticklish one. Unfortunately there do not seem to be a number of second-hand merchandise and scrap dealers eager to relieve schools and libraries of their old textbooks and library materials. Some AEAMCs have been able to arrange for recycling of text and library books. Among the methods which have been tried are the following;

1. Recycle if possible.
2. Bag and tag for destruction.
3. Put a few in each wastebasket every day.
4. Take them to the dump.
5. Take them to another community's dump.
6. Tear or break them up and put them in a wastebasket.
7. Offer them to a charity book sale - many such groups now sell magazines, records, etc., as well as books.
8. Have a white elephant sale.
9. Put in lunchroom garbage collection--discourages sorting and retrieval.
10. Box and send to the superintendent.
11. Store them until they are forgotten.

Whichever method or methods are used, there are some general points to keep in mind:

1. The method(s) selected should be in harmony with school policy.
2. The school district selection policy should specifically assign responsibility for discard of library materials and equipment to the library media specialist, including responsibility to determine intrinsic worth.
3. The school district should have established depreciation tables for library materials and equipment. Such tables also help justify discard of materials and equipment purchased with federal funds.
4. All items not destroyed should have all identifying marks removed and/or be clearly marked as discarded.
5. Library materials in classrooms need to be weeded too. The classroom should not become a dump. If older items such as sets of encyclopedias are placed in classrooms, they should be discarded after a specified time.

6. If major weeding is to be done, the school and community should be prepared, and advised that regular weeding in the future will be at a more sedate pace.

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